



# Family Engagement and Involvement

Bernalillo County Youth Services Center

## Overview

**In April 2016 the Youth Services Center staff conducted a JDAI (Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative) Detention Self Inspection.**

The ***JDAI Self Inspection Team*** included representatives from the Farmington and Roswell state to scale sites in New Mexico, from the Children Youth and Families Department, the New Mexico Association of Counties, from the community; including two organizations that advocate for families, from the Albuquerque Public Schools, and a team of youth from the **LOUD** Youth Council (Leaders Organizing 2 Unite and Decriminalize).

This is the third JDAI Detention Self-Inspection conducted at the Youth Services Center and is embedded as part of the formal consistent quality improvement practices of the facility.

### Families Interviewed

As part of the Detention Self Inspection process, two families, who had recently had a child detained in the Youth Services Center, were also interviewed. These families were interviewed by a family advocate organization. Although it was a very small sample of interviews it did provide a snapshot of their

experiences and corroborated the interviews with Youth Services Center staff regarding the same standards. Those standards are listed in this document.

## Findings and Recommendations

The following report outlines the findings and recommendations for Policy Change, Procedure Change and Adaptive (or Culture Change) for the Bernalillo County Youth Services Center regarding its engagement and involvement with **FAMILIES**.

The report is organized by category according to the Acronym **CHAPTERS**.

**C**hapters - **C**lassification and Intake

**ch**apters - **H**ealth and Mental Health

**chA**pters - **A**ccess

**chaP**ters - **P**rogramming

**chapT**ers - **T**raining

**chaptE**rs - **E**nvironment

**chapteR**s - **R**estraints

**chapterS** - **S**afety

In the report, each category of JDAI standard findings and recommendations is preceded by an overview of the standard by a synopsis of the findings and finally by a synopsis of the recommendations to sustain from the Self Inspection Team.

### The rating scale is as follows

**Recommendation to Sustain:** Status is favorable. Efforts should be made to maintain and continue to build upon a positive practice.

**Recommendation to Refine:** Status is minimally sufficient may be limited or inconsistent, may be short term due to changing circumstances or lack of policy and procedure.

**Recommendation to Improve:** Status is insufficient. Practice may be absent or not operative. Practice strategies may be performed inappropriately or harmfully.

This rating scale is the same scale the New Mexico Children, Youth and Families' Department (CYFD) uses in its *Quality Service Review* practice. The detention center will be conducting quality service

reviews in conjunction with CYFD as an additional Quality Improvement Practice and Measure and as a follow up to this report.

### **Summary Statement- Family Engagement and Involvement:**

#### ***Findings:***

- Self-Inspection Team findings from interviews with both staff and the two families interviewed, indicate that there are many opportunities to engage with and inform families throughout a youth's stay in detention, and that the Youth Services Center has a great basis of current family engagement practice to build on and expand in order to meet the JDAI standards.
- Teams noted that interactions already occur, sometimes with great frequency, with families through intake, with the Albuquerque Public School staff and with mental health and medical staff.
- The team noted that the two families interviewed indicated they had little information on what occurs in the detention center with their youth, one of these families was Spanish speaking only.

#### ***Recommendations:***

The team strongly urged the Youth Services Center to build on the family engagement points of contact available and to create more opportunities for family contact/visitation as part of a trauma informed approach to facility management, citing the significant positive impact on youth behavior and self-regulation, and the benefits of helping staff to regulate the confinement environment.

The Self-Inspection teams noted the extensive body of research that indicates positive outcomes for youth are enhanced when families are engaged, involved and valued in the systems practice.

And the team recommended that the consistent delivery of information and the opportunity for engagement be extended to all families.



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## Standards, Findings and Recommendations Related to Families

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### Classification and Intake

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JDAI Standard: Admissions criteria limit detention eligibility to youth likely to commit serious offenses pending resolution of their cases, youth likely to fail to appear in court, and youth held pursuant to a specific court order for detention.

Finding: Criteria, per policy, is extended “to cooling off” period for domestic violence cases. It is used to separate youth and family. YSC will hold kids up to six hours for releases to parent, guardian, and custodian. If parent, guardian, custodian do not pick up youth within 6 hours, client may be taken to RAC. The concern is 6 hours is a long period of time. There are questions of how does law enforcement identify who take into custody, parent, guardian, custodian, or youth.

Recommendation to improve: Create a MOU with law enforcement agencies to take youth to RAC for cooling off period, thus reducing the amount of youth held for 6 hours or more in detention for misdemeanor domestic violence charges.

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### Access

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JDAI Standard: The facility develops and implements written policies, procedures, and actual practices to ensure that staff, youth, and families understand any limitations on persons with whom youth may correspond. The facility permits youth to correspond with incarcerated family members absent a specific and articulable security reason.

Finding: Residents are not allowed to correspond with incarcerated family members.

Recommendation to refine: Review policy and ensure that there is an “articulable” security reason/criteria for staff to follow in the practice of this policy.

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JDAI Standard: Facility staff provide youth with reasonable access to telephones, and staff do not listen in on or record youth's conversations absent individualized reasonable suspicion of in on or record youth's conversations absent individualized reasonable suspicion of criminal activity or a threat to the security of the facility. The facility informs youth if telephone calls may be monitored.

Finding: All phone calls are recorded, not all phone calls are monitored. Calls that residents make have an auto-generated announcement that is played for the caller and the receiver of the call that states that the call is from an inmate at the Bernalillo County Detention Center and that the call is monitored. Additionally, that the call may be monitored, is listed on the phone and in the resident handbook. Youth appear to be punished for problematic behavior on calls at times which does not rise to the level of the criteria for criminal activity or threat to the security of the facility.

Recommendation to improve: Review existing policy and develop strategies to come into compliance with the above standard.

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JDAI Standard: Calls are available free of charge.

Finding: The Family Connections program which provides the resident a free phone call once a week, exists and is used by residents. Additionally, if there is a request through case management the resident can make a free phone call.

Money is needed to make calls to family except on Saturdays through the Family Connections Program which is a free, 5-minute phone call. Ability to make other calls outside of requests through case management is dependent on if resident has money in account (\$0.08/minute).

Recommendation to improve: Ensure all phone calls are free for residents, in the event this cannot occur, ensure all residents know about free phone call options, which include includes informing residents multiple times in multiple venues throughout the resident's stay.

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JDAI Standard: The facility provides alternative ways of visiting for family members and others who cannot easily travel to the facility (e.g., Skype or FaceTime). These alternatives complement, but do not replace, in-person visitation opportunities.

Finding: YSC does not have Skype or FaceTime but do accommodate families who travel. YSC has a special visitation policy which addresses visitation by those who travel a great distance.

Recommendation to improve: Staff thought Skype or FaceTime would be a good idea for the youth. Review policy and practice to determine if Skype and/or FaceTime are viable options that can be implemented. Review policy for users' ease, that outlines the process which families or stakeholders helping families use to make accommodations for parents who travel.

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JDAI Standard: The facility arranges for youth with incarcerated family members to speak with them by phone or other appropriate means absent a specific and articulable security reason.

Finding: No communication with other facilities allowed.

Recommendation to improve: Review policy to assess current practice and determine if it is possible for youth to call another facility to speak with family members.

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JDAI Standard: The facility offers parents and guardians a verbal, written, audiovisual, or group orientation within seven days of youth's admission to the facility. The facility makes orientation materials available in the primary language spoken in the household, or the facility makes other accommodations to ensure that parents and guardians who are limited English proficient understand how the facility operates.

Finding: Two families were interviewed, one family spoke Spanish only. Though YSC has a Spanish version of the orientation handbook, they both reported that they did not receive information or an orientation the entire time their youth was in the facility.

Recommendation to improve: Provide a handbook to give to parents and guardians in both English and Spanish. Provide an in person orientation for families so they can have a better understanding of what goes on the facility.

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JDAI Standard: Written materials for family members, such as handbooks and pamphlets, are clearly written and easy to understand.


Finding: Two families were interviewed, both families' reported that never received written materials.

Recommendation to improve: Provide a handbook in English and Spanish for families.

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JDAI Standard: Facility administrators provide a way for parents and guardians, including individuals who are limited English proficient, to ask questions about the facility and its programs and ensure that those questions are answered.

Finding: One family, whose primary language is Spanish, reported no one spoke to them and they did not know who to go to. The other family reported they had no contact with facility staff except nurse.



Recommendation to improve: Provide in person orientation classes for the parents and guardians, so they may ask questions and get the answers they are seeking.

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JDAI Standard: Parents and guardians receive contact information for a staff member who they can contact to obtain information about their child and his or her adjustment to the facility. The facility makes appropriate arrangements to communicate with parents or guardians who are limited English proficient.

Finding: Two families were interviewed, both families reported they were never given any information on contacting a staff member to find out how their child was adjusting.

Recommendation to improve: Implement new policy and procedures to address the above standard.

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JDAI Standard: Staff makes efforts to involve family members in decisions about their child at the facility, including identifying behavior management strategies, making decisions about education, medical, and mental health services, and planning for the youth's discharge, when feasible.

Finding: Two families were interviewed and reported they never had these opportunities. Staff - including case management and medical reported that they do call families on a case by case basis regarding information on medical and mental health matters as well as parents/guardians of residents who require higher level of managed care and custody.

Recommendation to improve: Families would like to meet with staff and be a part of the behavior management, medical and mental health decision making processes. Identify ways to include families in behavior management strategies and decisions regarding education, medical and mental health service planning for youth in the facility and for their discharge and incorporate those strategies into policy and practice.

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JDAI Standard: There are regular forums at which families of detained youth may voice issues of concern, offer suggestions for improvement, and obtain needed information about institutional policies and practices. The facility makes appropriate arrangements to communicate with parents or guardians who are limited English proficient.

Finding: The two families interviewed reported that they never knew of any forums or had a chance to voice opinions. Staff are not aware of any forums for families.

Recommendation to improve: Ensure families are aware of the grievance process. Families would like a meeting with staff and to be a part of the policy making process. Families need a community space with community support to create a forum where they can voice opinions, raise issues of concern, offer suggestions for improvement and obtain needed information about institutional policies and practices.

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JDAI Standard: Administrators help family members arrange for transportation to and from the facility if the facility is not otherwise accessible via public transportation.

Finding: Families reported that they never had these opportunities.

Recommendation to improve: Identify ways this standard could be implemented. This would most likely affect regional youth and families detained at the facility.

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JDAI Standard: The facility involves family members when revising policies that relate to family members' access to the facility, including policies on grievances, visitation, and access to telephone and mail.

Finding: Two families interviewed reported that they were never given or have participated in developing revised policies.

Recommendation to improve: Families interviewed expressed they would like a meeting with staff and be a part of the process of developing revised policies including those policies involving notification of strip searches and notification of youth being placed on suicide watch- and/or any other potential safety issues that youth may have experienced or be at high risk to experience.

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## Searches

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JDAI Standard: When staff search youth who are returning from court, school, another facility, visits on the premises or who have otherwise been continuously supervised, they do so by a pat-down, metal detector or clothing search. Staff conduct strip or visual body cavity searches in such circumstances only with prior supervisory approval, upon reasonable suspicion that a youth is in possession of a weapon or contraband and in accordance with applicable law.

Finding: YSC staff do not conduct body cavity searches and YSC has a policy that states: “The Center does not conduct body cavity searches, staff are trained that we do not conduct body cavity searches, and if a body search was necessary for exigent safety reasons only a medical provider is authorized at the approval of only the Director. There is no designee in the policy for authorizing of body cavity searches.”

Youth believe that strip searches are necessary at times but report feeling humiliated and state that they don’t know why everyone has to have them after every visitation. Staff follow policy for strip searches which is a general policy applying to all youth in a circumstance, not guided by supervisory approval.

Recommendation to Improve: Review strip search policies and practice to ensure they adhere to and reflect JDAI standards.

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## Use of Force, Restraints and Chemical Agents

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JDAI Standard: Staff notify the youth’s parents or guardians and the youth’s attorney or guardian ad litem of all use of force or restraint incidents by the end of the next business day following the use of physical force or restraint incidents involving the youth. In the case of youth with disabilities or mental illness, the facility provides written notice to the protection and advocacy agency for individual with disabilities within 24 hours of the restraint incident.

Finding: Team could not find evidence that parent, attorneys, and/or guardian ad-litem were notified after use of force or restraint incidents

Recommendation to Improve: Ensure practice and policies include the notification of parents- guardians and or attorney. Include policies regarding youth with disabilities

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## Safety

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JDAI Standard: Staff notify parents or guardians and the youth's attorney of any investigations into abuse, neglect, retaliation, and neglect or violation of responsibilities that involves their child, as well as any investigations into their child's behavior within 24 hours of learning of the information. If a youth is under the guardianship of the child welfare system, staff notify the youth's caseworker within 24 hours of learning of the information. Staff attempt to make contact with the individuals listed above by phone on at least three occasions, documenting the date, time, and result of each attempt. If staff cannot reach the individuals listed above after making such attempts, staff mail a letter to the individuals at their last known address and document the mailing.

Finding: There is no documentation listing when parents/guardians or the youth's attorney have been notified of an investigation being conducted.

Recommendation to Improve: Review documents and ensure there is a place to document date and time they were notified in accordance with above policies.

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